

# Coot

*Fulica atra*

Category A

Breeding resident and winter visitor.

*World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):*

Widespread across much of Europe eastwards across southern Siberia to the Pacific, and south to Arabia, India and Australia. In warm and temperate regions, present all year (though individuals not necessarily resident), but mainly migratory in northern and especially eastern Europe under the influence of the continental climate, with small numbers even reaching sub-Saharan Africa.

*Kent status (KOS 2021):*

A common and widespread resident breeding species and winter visitor in Kent.



Coot at Princes Parade (Nigel Webster)

The Coot was included in Knight and Tolputt's "List of birds observed in Folkestone and its immediate neighbourhood" (1871). This list covered an area of six miles radius from Folkestone town hall, therefore extending further inland than the current Folkestone and Hythe area, so this does not provide conclusive evidence of its occurrence here, however it seems most likely to have occurred within the current area, nearer to the coast. Ticehurst (1909) considered it to be "very local" as a breeding species in Kent, occurring mainly in the north Kent marshes, in the Romney Marsh and on some of the larger lakes and ponds, but noted that many other lakes and ponds are visited by migrant birds. He also remarked that hard weather led to arrivals from the north, which have to move to brackish and salt water, commenting that "in unusually severe winters I have seen them in numbers in the open sea some distance from land off our south coast".

## Breeding atlas distribution

Figure 1 shows the breeding distribution by tetrad based on the results of the 2007-13 BTO/KOS atlas fieldwork.



Figure 1: Breeding distribution of Coot at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad (2007-13 BTO/KOS Atlas)

Breeding was confirmed in five tetrads, with probable breeding in five more and possible breeding in two others. The table below shows how this compares to previous atlases (Taylor *et al.* 1981; Henderson & Hodge 1998). The confirmed and probable breeding categories have been combined to account for differing definitions of these in the first atlas.

Breeding atlases	1967 - 1973		1988 - 1994		2007 - 2013	
Possible	0	(0%)	3	(10%)	2	(6%)
Probable/Confirmed	1	(3%)	1	(3%)	10	(32%)
Total	1	(3%)	4	(13%)	12	(39%)
Change			+3	(+300%)	+9	(+200%)

The table below shows the changes in tetrad occupancy across the three atlas periods.

Trends	First to second atlas (1967-73 to 1988-94)	Second to third atlas (1988-94 to 2007-13)	First to third atlas (1967-73 to 2007-13)
Local	+300%	+200%	+1,100%
Kent	+56%	+33%	+107%

Coots have frequented the Nickolls Quarry area since at least November 1950 and up to six pairs nested there in the early 1950s, with two to three pairs since (Norman 2007). The only breeding record in the first atlas was undoubtedly at this site (in TR13 G), which is the largest local waterbody, with Taylor *et al.* noting that “the Coot... usually requires at least half a hectare of open water and dense vegetation for nesting”.

Henderson & Hodge, in reviewing the results of the second county atlas, concluded that there were “all the indications of an expansion of range since the first atlas and, although some of this may be due to better coverage, a good deal of it may be genuine. Some of the spread has been on to new gravel pits and reservoirs but elsewhere it appears that the species has colonised existing water bodies including relatively small ponds and dykes. This could be the result of an increasing population spilling over from the preferred larger wetlands as they reach capacity”. TR13 G was again occupied (presumably at Nickolls Quarry) and it had also spread to TR13 B (presumably at one of the sewers on Romney Marsh), TR13 E (presumably at Cock Ash Lake or Horton Priory) and TR13 T (presumably at Beachborough Lakes).

Clements *et al.* (2015) commented on a further expansion in the third atlas, with an increase in occupied tetrads of 33%, remarking that “it seems likely that the spread into more marginal habitat noted in the second Kent atlas has continued. The establishment of more small fishing lakes on farmland in the county will have helped this spread”. They also remarked that the increase showed some correlation to the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) trend increase in south-east England of 28% between 1995 and 2012.

It is currently quite well-distributed within TR13 but the only nesting site within TR23 is Radnor Park in Folkestone.



Coot at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)



Coot at Botolph's Bridge (Brian Harper)

## Overall distribution

Figure 2 shows the distribution of all records of Coot by tetrad, with records in 19 tetrads (61%).

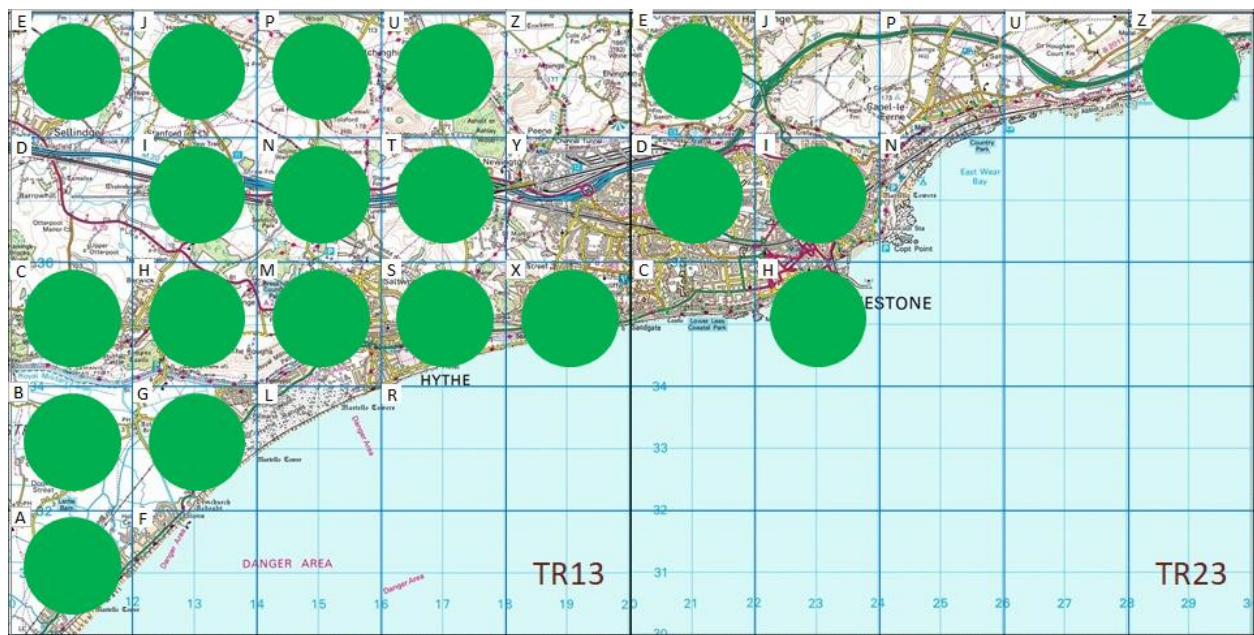


Figure 2: Distribution of all Coot records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

The first significant winter numbers at Nickolls Quarry were recorded in the 1957/58 winter, when there was a peak of 64 on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1958, whilst the next two winters produced peaks of 60 on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1959 and 70 on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1960. The 1961/62 winter saw even greater numbers, with a minimum of 130 present on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 1962, whilst 80 were still present on the relatively late date of 25<sup>th</sup> March.

Subsequent counts at this site included 87 on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1969, up to 200 in January/February 1970, 180 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1979, c.200 on the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1982 (with 120 still present on the 21<sup>st</sup> February) and “well over 100” in February 1985. In the 1990s there were further counts there of 115 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1993 and 119 on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1996, with 107 on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

Large numbers were typically associated with severe weather. There have been no three-figure counts since 2010, which may be due to a succession of mild winters, but increased disturbance and habitat degradation associated with development works are also likely to have had an impact. The largest count there in recent years was 23 on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020.

Other sites that have produced double-figure counts are the Royal Military Canal between Hythe and Palmarsh (where there were 22 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1959), the lake near Rose Cottage on Burmarsh Road (where there was a peak of 28 on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2009), West Hythe (with a peak of 10 on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011), the Willop Basin (with a peak of 12 on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018), Beachborough Lakes (with a peak of 14 on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019) and Cock Ash Lake (with a peak of 15 on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

Apart from a breeding pair at Radnor Park it is an exceptionally rare bird in TR23, where there have been just five other records as follows:

- One in Folkestone Harbour (TR23 H/I) on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1993
- Up to three in Folkestone Harbour (TR23 H/I) between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> January 1997
- One on the main pond at Samphire Hoe (TR23 Z) on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2001
- One at Cherry Garden reservoirs (TR23 D/E) on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2010
- Two in Folkestone Harbour (TR23 H/I) between the 10<sup>th</sup> January and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011



Coot nest near the Willop Sewage Works (Ian Roberts)



Coot at Radnor Park (Ian Roberts)



Coot at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)

## References

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### ***Acknowledgements***

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).

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Coots at Beachborough Lakes (Steve Tomlinson)